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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000007

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/PASCUAL/RAMCHAND

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TAGS: KWBG IS PTER MOPS ASEC

SUBJECT: GAZA UPDATE JANUARY 2, 1300 LOCAL: NO LET-UP IN AIRSTRIKES AND ROCKET FIRE

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. From 1300 January 1 through 1300 on January 2, at least 54 rockets (including 12 Grad-types) struck Israel, injuring three Israelis. Israeli airstrikes focused on northern Gaza and Gaza City killed at least 21 Palestinians (including several children), most notably senior Hamas leader Nizar al-Rayyan. Gaza-based sources report that at least 399 Palestinians have been killed and over 1500 have been injured (requiring hospital attention) since December 27. (Note: Local press put the toll at over 420 killed and 2000 injured. End note). Demonstrations are taking place throughout the West Bank after Friday prayers on January 2; PA security personnel are attempting to prevent clashes with Israeli forces. President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) will lead an Arab League delegation to attend UNSC sessions next week to push for a resolution that ends the fighting. End summary.

Rocket Attacks Still Pound Israel; 21 Palestinians Killed in Airstrikes, Including Hamas Leader

¶2. (SBU) At least 52 rockets struck Israel from 1300 January 1 through 1300 on January 2, including 12 Grad-types which hit Be'er Sheva, Ashkelon, Netivot, and Ashdod, and near the Hatzerim military base. Hamas claimed responsibility for 29 of the rocket attacks. Three Israelis were reported to have been lightly injured in strikes on Ashkelon. Qassams struck communities all around the Gaza perimeter, causing minor property damage but no injuries.

¶3. (SBU) Israeli airstrikes killed at least 21 Palestinians and injured dozens more through 1300 on January 2, including a January 1 airstrike that flattened an apartment building in Jabaliya, killing senior Hamas political leader Nizar al-Rayyan and at least nine members of his family. Airstrikes focused on northern Gaza and Gaza City during the reporting period, including frequent attacks against open areas near Jabaliya, Bayt Hanun, and Bayt Lahiya. 21 houses in this area were destroyed or heavily damaged during airstrikes, according to Gaza-based contacts. Security contacts report that an airstrike targeting a PRC military camp at 1535 on January 1 killed two children and injured 40 Palestinians from the Nada Towers refugee housing areas in northern Gaza. Air-to-ground shelling caused heavy cratering in Gaza City and on northern Gaza roadways during the reporting period. Security contacts said an airstrike on January 1 in central Gaza killed an al-Quds Brigades activist and injured two others in Nussayrat Refugee Camp. Hamas military-wing member Mahmud Ashur was killed in an IAF strike in al-Burayj Refugee Camp. The IAF struck a mosque in the Abbasan village near Khan Yunis, destroying it and injuring 17 Palestinians who lived nearby.

West Bank and Jerusalem Clashes

¶4. (C) Hamas leaders called for mass demonstrations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem starting January 2. PA security personnel are deployed to contain violence or clashes with Israeli forces after Friday prayers. PA security contacts told ConGenOffs that the PA will allow the demonstrations but will not permit demonstrators to approach IDF positions. These contacts say they anticipate Palestinian-Israeli clashes in areas without a PA security presence, including Oalandia, Hebron's H2 zone, and villages west of Ramallah and Bethlehem. Palestinian press report that GOI DefMin Ehud Barak ordered a general closure of the West Bank on January 2-3, and raised the IDF's alert status.

¶5. (SBU) The IDF arrested Samu'a Mayor Jamal Abu al-Jadalyil and 15 other Palestinians in the West Bank during the reporting period, most near Hebron, Nablus, and in villages between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Israeli police are deployed in large numbers in East Jerusalem (including the Old City) on January 2, and are restricting entrance to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount to East Jerusalem males under 15 and over 50 years of age. (Note: No Palestinians holding West Bank IDs are allowed entry; there are no age restrictions on women holding Jerusalem IDs).

Political Reactions

¶6. (SBU) PLO Executive Committee (ExComm) Secretary-General Yassir Abd Rabbo told press January 1 that President Abbas will lead an Arab League delegation to UNSC sessions next

JERUSALEM 0000007 002 OF 002

Monday. Abd Rabbo said the delegation will push for a resolution that results in a complete cessation of hostilities, and added that the Palestinian leadership is ready to restart dialogue between the PLO and Hamas to end political divisions. He said that President Abbas, pursuant to his December 31 speech, instructed all PA, PLO and Fatah officials to stop any incitement or negative media exchanges with Hamas or PIJ officials and not to respond to inflammatory statements.

¶7. (C) PM Salam Fayyad released a statement January 1 welcoming the Arab league decision to dispatch a delegation to UNSC headed by President Abbas. The statement also supported Saudi government calls for a national consensus government to end political divisions. (Note: Separately, according to PA security contacts, PM Fayyad gave the PA security chiefs instructions to prevent Hamas activists from instigating violent clashes with Israeli security forces in the West Bank, and to continue arrests of Hamas officials suspects of planning attacks or disorder. End note).

¶8. (SBU) Lebanon-based Hamas Politburo member Usama Hamdan told press January 1 that Hamas welcomes President Abbas' call for a halt to incitement between Palestinian factions. However, Hamdan said it will not be appropriate to discuss political unity or new elections until violence in Gaza ends and the crossings open. Gaza-based Hamas officials called for Palestinians to engage in "resistance" in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and to attack Israeli interests everywhere in response to Nizar al-Radwan's death.

WALLES